



**IMPACT OF COVID 19
NATIONAL LOCKDOWN ON
WOMEN STREET
VENDORS IN DELHI**

Institute of Social Studies Trust

KEY FINDINGS

97.14% of the respondents have been adversely affected by the lockdown.

Amidst the lockdown, the women vendors have completely lost their livelihoods, mostly found in weekly haats or street-side/footpath stalls.

54% of the respondents have taken a loan to help them sustain during the lockdown period and **37.1%** respondents are finding it difficult to repay the loans. **65%** respondents said they are depending on their personal or household savings to help them sustain the loss of income.

Most street vendors do not have ration cards or any other government document to avail the subsidised/free food services and information regarding e-coupon for non-ration card holders is limited.

Since only vegetable/fruit vending is allowed, many other street vendors/hawkers who used to sell food etc. are shifting to that, which is leading to much chaos in the wholesale markets which are also difficult to access.

6% respondents attributed the income deficit to mobility restraints or police patrolling during the lockdown period and **88%** respondents could not continue work due to fear of contracting the disease.

Around **20** participants shared lack of support from their family members in sharing household chores and care burden. In cases where the respondents are getting support, **10** responses show that the support is provided by other women members in the family. The women are also not able to explore alternative employment options as they have young children who need care.

Vendors selling through carts have been harassed by RWA's and colonies are not allowing their entry. Harassment of Muslim vendors after the Tablighi Jamaat case has also been reported.

Since most of the street vendor population is migrant, **5.7%** respondents expressed concern over payment of house-rent which is an issue both in the current phase and post-lockdown.

Most of the respondents procured food from public distribution shops (PDS) and government canteens providing free ration. Whereas only **2.85%** respondents accessed cooked food distributed by the government, where quality of was found to be quite minimal and there was always a long queue.

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact now that the crisis of the Corona pandemic and the consequent national lockdown has shown its worst face to the class of informal and migrant workers. This impact study reiterates the presence of inequality between class, gender and the informal worker population. It attempts to evidence (and is part of a series of other reports on different sectors of informal work) about the sector of workers involved in Street vending with a special focus impact on the paid work and unpaid care activities of women workers.

The street vending economy approximately has a parallel turnover of Rs 80 crore a day and every street entrepreneur/trader support an average of three others as employees or partners or workers on commission. All of them earn a livelihood, bare but sufficient. **National Hawkers Federation estimates say that 50% of the street vendors sell food. At least 35% of the fruits and vegetables sold in urban areas and in far-flung, remote rural corners are also sold by vendors. The remaining 20% of vendors sell clothes, plastic goods, unbranded crockery, cutlery and household goods.** The economic impact of the lockdown has been extreme on the supply chain and the informal sector production lines that have shut down as the hawkers have gone off the streets (Mukherjee, 2020). **As self-employed entrepreneurs, street vendors are part of a “low circuit” economy and the lockdown has brought a complete break in this circuit¹.**

50%
street vendors
sell fruit

35%
sell fruits &
vegetables

20%
sell other
miscellaneous
items



SECTOR PROFILE

Street Vendors Act, 2014² defines a 'street vendor' as “a person engaged in vending of articles, goods, wares, food items or merchandise of everyday use or offering services to the general public, in a street, lane, side walk, footpath, pavement, public park or any other public place or private area, from a temporary built up structure or by moving from place to place and includes hawker, peddler, squatter and all other synonymous terms which may be local or region specific”. (Rattan, 2015³)

There are **roughly 2 crore hawkers in India forming 2% of the urban population** (with recent numbers being estimated around 4 crore). **Further 1/3rd (30%) of this population forms the women street vendor population, who are mostly found in weekly haats and street/roadside/footpath stalls, or helping their families/husbands in the back-end work.** (Telephonic Interview with Dharmendra Kumar-Janpahal, April 2020).

Further the **street as workspace is doubly insecure for women workers, as there is a constant threat of sexual harassment and their safety.** Literature shows that many women street vendors have faced sexual harassment, coupled with the stigma of sitting on the street and peddling wares, and how this contributes to the vulnerability of their situation (Chakraborty, 2015⁴).

¹Mukerjee, S. (2020). The Streets Are Empty. How Are Hawkers Surviving This Lockdown? The Wire. Retrieved May 7, 2020, from <https://thewire.in/labour/street-hawkers-lockdown>

²The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act was passed in 2014, which promotes the regulation of street vending as a livelihood opportunity for vendors by designating vending areas and providing for registration of vendors for access to protection and social security benefits. However the attempt to 'formalise' this informal sector takes away the benefits of informality that the street vendor experiences, with corruption and hierarchy at various levels taking away choice and autonomy from the vendor (Mathur, 2014).

³Rattan, P. (2015). Street Vendors Act 2014: A Forgotten Promise. Working Paper: 341. Researching Reality Summer Internship 2015.

⁴Chakraborty, R. (2015). Women at Work: An insight into the workspace of a 'gajra' vendor in Mumbai. Migration Narratives - The SHRAM Blog. (<http://www.shram.org/blogs>)

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

MARITAL STATUS

71.1%
MARRIED

22.9%
WIDOWED

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

57.2%
5-7 members

14.4%
8-10 members



28.6%
2-4 members

DEPENDANTS IN THE HOUSEHOLD



74.3% children
below 14 years

20% elderly above
60 years of age

11.4% disabled & unemployed
members

Study sites: Jwala Nagar, Mandawali, Chidhiyaghar, Laxmi Nagar

IMPACT ON PAID WORK

Impact of Lockdown

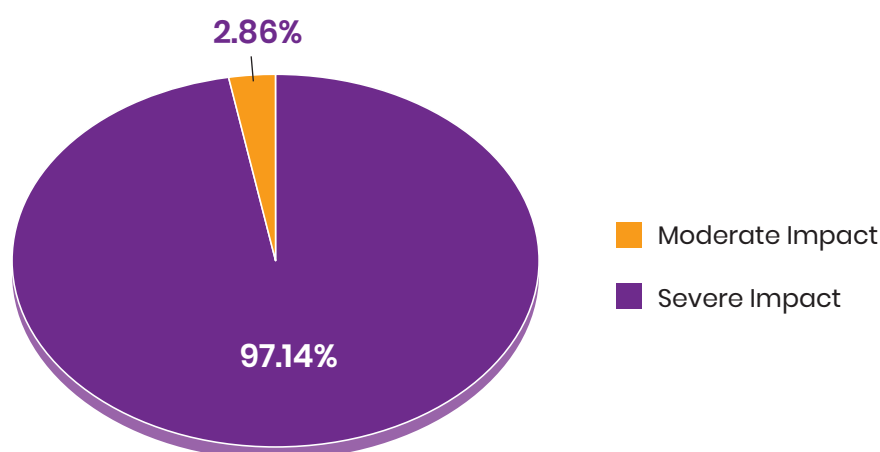
Most of the street vendors in the sample are migrant workers from UP, Bihar and West Bengal who are dependent on the daily wages they earn from street vending. A Key Informant informs that many of the migrant street vendors especially from Western UP and living in areas of East Delhi near the Anand Vihar Bus terminal have left for their villages in huge numbers, when few buses from the UP state government had been started in response to the 'migrant labour crisis' (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar - Janpahal, April 2020).

The impact of lockdown has been severe on street vendors since the nature of work requires excessive mobility and access to customers, goods and market. As one of the key informants highlighted that street vending is done in crowded places to get more access to customers hence more profit. In times like these, it

has naturally become difficult and many of them are not able to continue their work. (Telephonic interview with Sanjeeb Mali - Janpahal, April 2020).

Interviews with street vendors revealed that lockdown has adversely affected their work which also corresponds to the survey data where **97.14%** respondents mention the same as given in Figure 1. For instance, **those who sell food or tea have had to shut down their stalls, the weekly bazaars are completely shut and there are no footpath street vendors who have been mostly women.**

Figure 1: Impact of Lockdown on Income



Further a Key Informant shares that street vending as a profession requires a lot of labour input especially in running vegetable/food carts/hawking and therefore women vendors have mostly been found in either weekly bazaars or on the pavement/street side selling, both of which have been shut down, due to the lockdown (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar - Janpahal, April 2020).

However, one category of street vendors which could continue their work are those who sell vegetables and fruits as that has been under the essential items category. **One estimate suggests that about 8% of the fruits and vegetables sold in urban areas are sold through corporate retail and the rest 98% are sold through a network of street vendors across urban areas** (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar - Janpahal, April 2020).

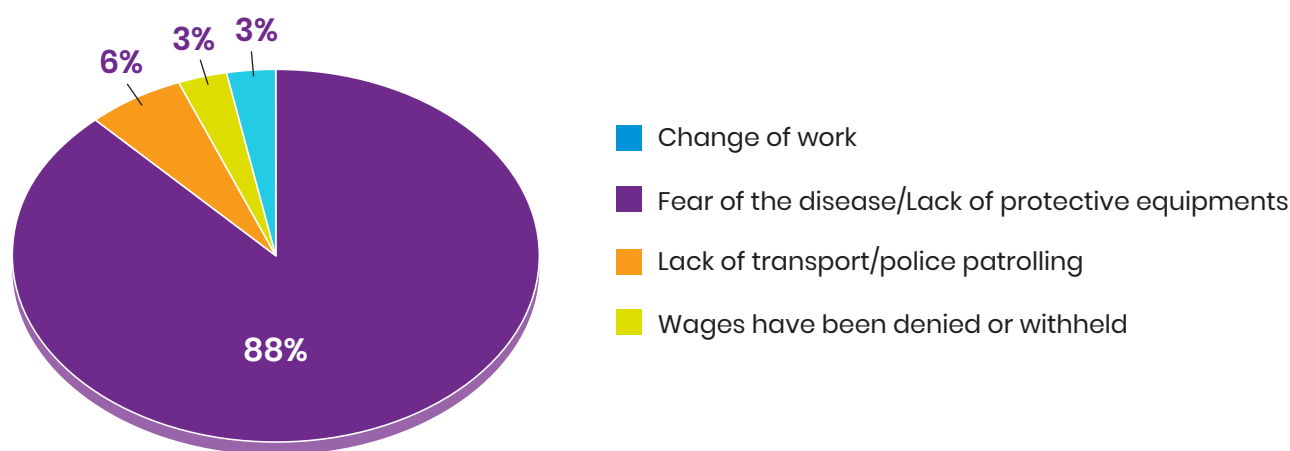
However, the wholesale markets for fruits and vegetables have been reported as difficult to access. Further now because only vegetable/fruit vending is allowed many other street vendors/hawkers who used to sell food etc. are also shifting to that, which is leading to much chaos in the wholesale markets.

One female street vendor shared that in her area during the lockdown police allowed vendors to sell vegetables at a designated time for one hour during the day (Telephonic interview, April 2020). However, it had its own set of problems. It was hot during this time (between 4-5 pm) and not many customers turned up to buy vegetables. They could not earn more than Rs 50-100 per day. Additionally, they faced harassment from the police.

Those who have carts have an advantage as they can sell vegetables and fruits by moving from one place to another. Those who do not own a cart have restricted access to customers. Moreover, even those selling through carts have been harassed by RWA's and colonies not allowing their entry and one KI also reported the harassment of Muslim vendors after the Tablighi Jamaat case, which was much hyped in the media for the spread of Covid-19 positive cases (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar- Janpahal, April 2020).

Further, mobility restraints have also been reflected in the data given in Figure-2, where 6% respondents attributed the income deficit to mobility restraints or police patrolling during the lockdown period and 88% respondents could not continue work due to fear of contracting the disease. Majority of women in the interviews have reported fear of getting COVID-19 as very strong (Telephonic interview, April 2020).

Figure 2: Reasons for fall in income from your primary occupation



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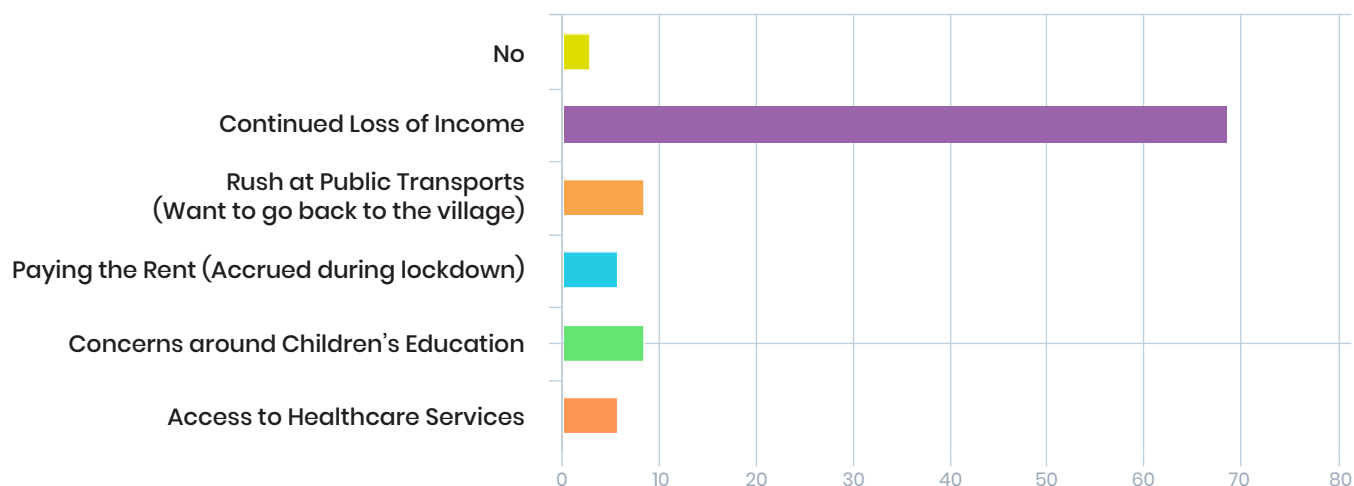
Do you think as a woman I can go around selling vegetables on the cart? Mobility is not possible for a woman.

Telephonic interview, April 2020

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Payment of house-rent is an issue both in the current phase and post-lockdown period which corresponded with survey data where 5.7% (Fig-3). Because most of the street vendor population is migrant, they often live off rented accommodation and loans from moneylenders. Often, they earn during the day and pay back rent or loan from the day's earnings. Now with no income and a total loss of livelihood, they have been either thrown out by their landlords or rarely are living off some mercy from the landlord (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar- Janpahal, April 2020).

Figure 3: Immediate concerns after lockdown



Managing and coping with the impact of Lockdown

The survey data shows that **54%** of the women workers have taken a loan to help them sustain during the lockdown period and **37.1%** respondents are unable to repay the loans. Table 2 indicates that the majority of the women street vendors who were severely impacted by the lockdown have taken loans from money lenders to support their families during the lockdown period.

Table 2: Cross-table between impact of lockdown and loan taken during lockdown

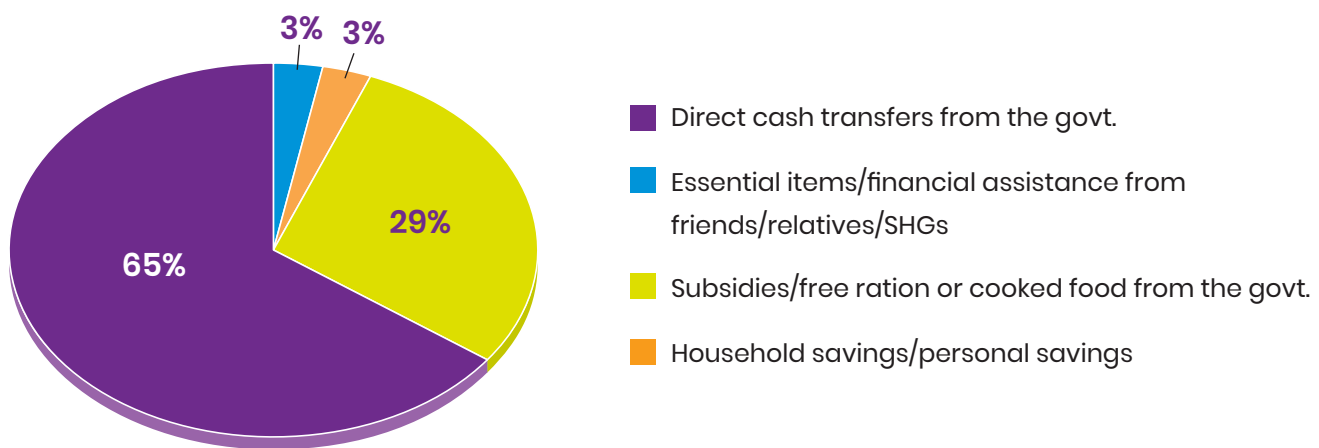
Impact of lockdown on paid work	Loan taken during lockdown		
	No	Yes	Total
Moderate impact	1	0	1
Severe impact	15	19	34
Total	16	19	35



Both the interviews and surveys suggest **that the majority women vendors are depending on their personal or household savings to sustain (Figure 4)**. In an interview a respondent shared that the family is using the savings kept aside for her daughter's wedding to help them sustain the loss of income (Telephonic interview, April 2020). Also the lack of cash inflow is a huge concern for the workers as noted by one of the KI's. **The cash transfers through Jan Dhan or pensions do not suffice much during this time of crisis.** (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar - Janpahal, April 2020).

Quoting one instance in the interview, a KI reported that one of the street vendors who has been living in Delhi for many years and is slightly better off, has gone into a debt trap, because of his daughter's regular medical expenses. **With no income coming in and with continued expenses, this debt trap is a vicious cycle**, notes the KI (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar - Janpahal, April 2020). Migrants and especially short-term migrants are **most affected since their bank accounts and other government documents such as Aadhar card is linked to their village and changing the address usually is a time taking process and hence they lose what they are entitled to** (Telephonic conversation with Sanjeeb Mali - Janpahal, April 2020).

Figure 4: Managing your daily expenses in the absence/reduction in income



IMPACT ON UNPAID WORK

The gender gap in unpaid care work was quite evident in the survey. **The data shows that 21 (60%) participants do not get any support from their family members in sharing household chores and care burden. In cases where the respondents are getting support, 10 responses show that the support is provided by other women members in the family.** Male participation in unpaid care work is very limited as per survey data with only 7 respondents stating that a male family member or husband contributed. Only one woman in the interview noted that as her husband is at home during the lockdown, he sometimes helps her in household chores (Telephonic interview, April 2020).

A key informant mentioned in the interview **that accessing cooked food from camp is an additional labour for many women workers.** For instance – as the food gets distributed at 12p.m, they have to reach the camp/school by 10 a.m. to stand in the queue. If they have young children at home, they are compelled to leave them behind which becomes difficult (Telephonic interview with Sanjeeb Mali - Janpahal, April 2020).

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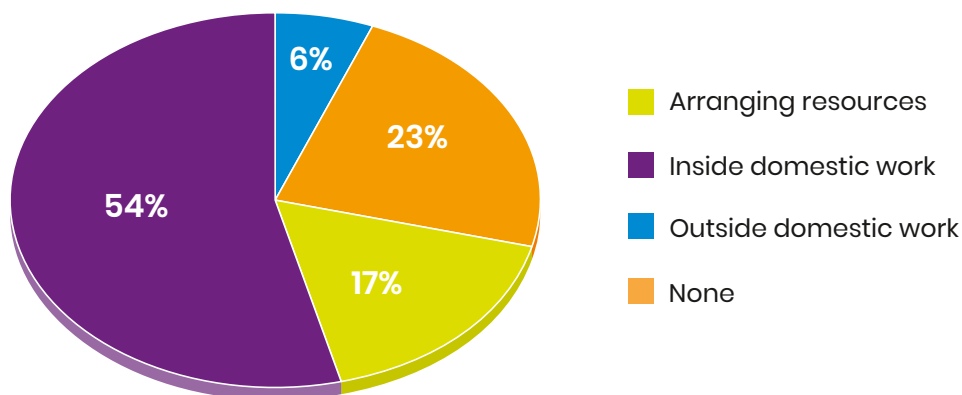
It just feels that we are eating and eating all the time and no money is coming in. When children are at home, they want snacks all the time but we are barely able to provide them meals.

There is no lockdown for a woman. Earlier if we used to make tea 2 times, now it is 4 times a day.

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Telephonic interview, April 2020

Figure 5: Increase in unpaid work



IMPACT ON ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL RESOURCES AND SERVICES

Majority of women workers from our sample procured food from public distribution shops (PDS) and government canteens providing free ration with Delhi government providing an extra of 2kgs ration in advance for the next month. **Whereas only 2.85% respondents accessed cooked food distributed by the government, it was reported that the quality of food in such free food distribution services by the government was quite minimal and there was always a long queue.** Another challenge with accessing cooked food was restrictions for women in standing in queues with other men/elders was found as culturally inappropriate by them (Telephonic interview with Vandana Narang – Janpahal, April, 2020).

Some women interviewed have also reported getting support for rations from their extended families (Telephonic interview, April 2020). Further **women with young children were facing extra difficulties because**

even with the ration from PDS shops, it was only basic food (Dal, atta, chawal) that was available, with no cash available for milk or baby food. Further it is reflected in the data, as much as **62.8%** respondents have seen an increase in the price of essential services.

A KI mentioned that many street vendors do not have ration cards or any other government documents to avail the subsidised/free food services and information regarding e-coupon for non-ration card holders is limited (Telephonic interview with Vandana Narang - Janpahal, April 2020).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Food, shelter and health are concerns needing immediate attention. There is a need to consider universality of reform. Further there needs to be specific data for issues related to migrants, women, and vulnerable populations so as to have proper inclusion in policy and schemes.

Normalcy will have to be brought soon and to come into recovery mode, economic-social packages and subsidies have to be announced, with a focus on identification of key sectors.

There is a need to generate work, wage security, support MSME's, stop any retrenchment of workers. Own account workers should be given better regulatory tools so that they can recover themselves.

It is fundamental to push for the proper implementation of the Street Vendors Act (2014) and the need for licensing so that their livelihoods is secured (Telephonic interview with Dharmendra Kumar- Janpahal, April 2020).

The exposure of street vendors to health vulnerabilities are high given that their workplace (market areas) is an open space and often unhygienic. Street vendors should be given health insurance preserve their rights of dignified livelihood (Telephonic interview with Sanjeeb Mali - Janpahal, April 2020).

METHODOLOGY NOTE

This study is one in the five Micro-studies series on impact of COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown on lives of women informal workers in Delhi. ISST partnered with Janpahal to conduct a telephonic survey (using google forms) with 35 women workers in the sector (street vending) between 23 - 28 April 2020. The ISST team also conducted telephonic interviews with key informants and a few women workers, based on access. All data collecting tools were translated in Hindi and consent was taken prior to any data collection. Names of women respondents have not been disclosed to maintain confidentiality.

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Firstly, we would like to extend our gratitude to Janpahal who agreed to collaborate with us and supported us throughout the study. We would like to thank Dhramendra, Sanjeeb, Vandana and the women workers for talking to us and giving us their time. And especially Vandana who conducted all the telephonic surveys single-handedly. We would also like to thank our colleagues at ISST for guiding us at every step, reviewing the report and providing us with valuable inputs. Lastly, extending our gratitude to ISST for giving us the opportunity to work on the series of studies on impact of COVID-19 on women workers.

AUTHORS

This report has been written by Gurpreet Kaur, Risha Ramachandran and Rituu B. Nanda, Institute of Social Studies Trust, May 2020.



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